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INTRODUCTION

VERMONT LAW SCHOOL'S NEW GENERAL PRACTICE PROGRAM: AN INTRODUCTION

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My appointment as Dean of Vermont Law School in July 1982 unfortunately coincided with another somewhat more significant event in legal education—the beginning of a persistent decline in law school applications. Until that time, certainly since the early sixties, law schools had been enjoying a steady increase in those seeking a legal education. The job of most admissions offices was to select as skillfully as possible from a steadily improving applicant pool year after year.

All that has changed dramatically. For the first time in recent history law schools have begun to focus on marketing. As a corollary, particularly among private largely tuition-dependent schools such as Vermont, there has been a great deal of introspection in which law faculties ask themselves how their contribution to legal education differs from that of every other law school in the country. How is the law school distinctive? The demands of the market place became the catalyst for a search for self-identity.

Here at Vermont Law School we already had our nationally recognized Environmental Law Center that distinguished us, and we had something no other law school in the country could claim as its own—Vermont! But, were there other features we could identify or develop that would further distinguish us? Early in this

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internal discussion our Librarian, Professor Les Peat, suggested a concentration in small firm practice. We noted then that the vast majority of lawyers in private practice in the United States are engaged in small firm practice (firms of less than 20). That is certainly true of Vermont's graduates. We further noted that on a national basis no law school has focused systematically on preparing its graduates for such a practice (the University of Montana has given thoughtful attention to the needs of lawyers likely to practice in Montana). Our growing appreciation of the potential for offering a concentration in small firm practice even developed to the point where in my 1984 Message to Prospective Students in the Vermont Law School Catalog, I included the statement, "the vast majority of law school graduates head toward a practice on Main Street, not Wall Street."

But it was not until I received a telephone call in June 1985 from Julien and Virginia Cornell, grandparents of one of our students, that the opportunity to develop this vague concept into an exciting innovation in legal education began to take tangible form. Mr. Cornell, who began his practice on Wall Street but then moved to a general practice in Central Valley, New York, felt strongly that law schools should do more to prepare their graduates for general practice and he knew enough about us to think that Vermont Law School would be the appropriate law school to initiate this noble experiment. The Cornells indicated that they were willing to make a substantial contribution to enable us to develop a curriculum designed specifically for a selected group of students to prepare them for general practice.

It quickly became apparent that before our faculty and trustees could accept the generous gift from the Cornells we would need a clearer definition of the program we were to establish. What would a general practice curriculum include? What resources would be needed for its implementation? We needed to have someone to help us design the contours of the program before we could decide whether or not to proceed. The Cornells, recognizing this, offered to provide for a consultant to help us develop a proposal for further consideration.

One of the great and unanticipated pleasures in being a dean is having the opportunity to meet and spend time with other deans. One such person who befriended me early during my deanship was Michael Meltsner, then Dean at Northeastern Law School, whose counsel to me was both generous and wise. Knowing

of Michael's experience and stature in legal education in general and clinical legal education in particular and that he had left the deanship to return to the somewhat more controllable demands of the pure academy, I thought of him immediately as the perfect person to be the architect of our program—if he would consent to do so. I knew that success for the project was assured when Michael Meltsner agreed to undertake the assignment.

Over the next several months Michael visited at the law school several times to meet with our faculty, students, and administration. He also visited with the Cornells, discussed the project with a group of the most respected practitioners in Burlington, Vermont, and, in March 1986, delivered to us "A Proposal for a General Practice Program at the Vermont Law School." The proposal and recommendations are outlined briefly in the Waterman Lecture that he delivered at the law school this fall and which is set forth below. With very slight modification by our faculty, the General Practice Program at Vermont Law School was endorsed by our faculty, Board of Trustees, and Julien and Virginia Cornell who have committed $400,000 for this year's planning and for the next three years of implementation.

Our theme for this year's Family Weekend and Fall Convocation at Vermont Law School was "Preparing Graduates for General Practice: Are Law Schools Doing the Job?" At the convocation, presenting the gift on behalf of himself and his wife Virginia, Julien Cornell closed his remarks with this observation:

> This is a bold and innovative program. It will require stamina as well as vision on the part of the law school faculty and administration to put it into effect. They will need the help of the Vermont Bar to establish the clinical program. They will need the help and understanding and financial support of their alumni, parents and friends to carry the General Practice Program into the future.
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> This is an historic occasion, as we put in place a new milestone in the history of legal education.

We at Vermont Law School are grateful for the extraordinary generosity and vision of Julien and Virginia Cornell and for the fine work of Michael Meltsner in bringing this vision that much closer to reality. All of us eagerly await the implementation of this exciting new contribution to legal education at Vermont Law School.